

One Road – Two Paths

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Mark 10:17-27
Preached On: Sunday, December 22, 2019

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark, the second book in the New Testament, chapter 10. As you're turning to Mark 10, I'm about to make a statement that for those of you that are guests and visitors with us may have never heard, those of you who are long term members, attenders here at First Baptist, Opelika, you will be most familiar with this statement. It goes a little something like this: if we did not celebrate the empty tomb of Easter, there would be no reason to celebrate Christmas. In fact, if Jesus Christ had not borne the sins of the world on his cross and three days later raise from the dead, and according to 1 Corinthians 15, being witnessed by over 500 individuals, we would never sing "Silent night, holy night." We would never gather around Luke 2 in that famous Christmas story from Scripture. So today as we gather on the last Sunday before what we know as that Christmas celebration, it is only fitting that we find ourselves in Mark 10. In fact, if you look ahead to chapter 11, you'll see that Jesus enters into the city of Jerusalem, he will do so for the very last time during his earthly ministry. It was a place that he frequented often if not for any other reason, on an annual basis he would gather there for the Passover feast. At age 12, the Bible recognizes that he confounded the scholars with his wisdom and understanding of the Scriptures. The Gospel of John makes it clear during his three and a half years of earthly ministry, every Passover season the one who was the Lamb of God would go into Jerusalem as they then took a lamb and celebrated God's deliverance in days past.

This would be his last journey to Jerusalem. In fact in chapter 11, what we know as Palm Sunday is the event therein. If you back it up a little bit to chapter 9, we discover that Jesus was on the north side of the geographical area on the other side of Jordan. He was up in the area very close to Nazareth where he was raised. The Bible says in chapter 10 that he began to make his way down toward Jerusalem. Jesus is on this road and halfway in between he's going to stop in a very well-known, famous, biblical city that was known for its walls coming down and that was Jericho and today in Mark 10, I want us to look at two individuals that he met on the road.

On the way to Jericho, he meets a man who we commonly refer to as the rich young ruler, and after he leaves Jericho, he meets a man who hopefully you're already familiar with, his name is Bartimaeus or otherwise known as blind Bartimaeus. As we're going to discover today, Jesus is on one road but there are two men who are on completely

different paths, and you and I have the privilege today of looking at their lives, looking at what Jesus said unto them and how they responded to Jesus, and in just a few moments we have a decision to make: will we be as the rich young ruler, or we will be as blind Bartimaeus. They both met the same Jesus and they both responded completely different.

I encourage you to turn to Mark 10, beginning in verse 17. It says,

17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? 18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. 19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. 20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. 21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. 22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. 23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? 27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

We fast forward to verse 46 on the other side of Jericho and rather than one who comes running, we discover one who for many years has been seated. It says,

46 And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. 48 And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. 49 And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. 50 And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. 51 And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. 52 And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

In this one single chapter of Scripture, we have two men from completely different backgrounds and completely different circumstances. In fact, I want to spend just a little time looking at the persons that are involved.

The first individual we do not have his name, we know him commonly as the rich young ruler. Why is that his title? Well, in the Gospel of Mark it makes it very clear that he is wealthy, in the Gospel of Matthew it declares that he is young of age, and there in the Gospel of Luke it says that he possesses authority and power in his community. We're not given his proper name but we're given a very clear description that he is rich, he is young, and he has authority, thus the rich young ruler. There later in the chapter, we have a man by the name of Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, which his name literally means, and it makes it very clear he is the one that is blind, he is the one that has been begging. There could not be two men from contrasting backgrounds such as these that Jesus would run into. In fact, what they do for us, though actual individuals and real characters in life history and in the Bible, they share for us the complete extremes on the spectrum of life.

There are those of you here listening to my voice, there are those that no matter how you have placed the apparel on your body, you identify more with Bartimaeus, do you not? Maybe you're one who consistently struggles. You feel like your life can be summarized by you're a day late and a dollar short to everything that occurs. Bartimaeus when it came to his finances, he was completely dependent on somebody else's provision. In the context in which he lived, the days in which he lived, he did not have the technology and the resources that we do today, his entire financial well-being was based on the generosity of others who he never could see their identity. Well, the other individual was much the opposite. In fact, the Bible says that he had great wealth. He had so much wealth that when Jesus said, "Sell it all and give it to the poor," the Bible actually says he went away saddened. Now I don't think many of us today look at the character of Bartimaeus and say, "That's me." You may empathize and feel like him but in our culture today, you and I would have to be honest with each other that there are Bartimaeuses in our world but there's more of the other guy than there are Bartimaeus.

Now today I want to share with you that your life and my life lines up more with the rich young ruler than it does Bartimaeus, and I actually have the evidence. We call him rich. Now if I were to ask you are you wealthy, it's amazing that none of us declare that we are wealthy. In fact, I'm just gonna move that. Why do we not think we're wealthy? Because we consistently compare ourselves to the Joneses. You know, we talk about keeping up with the Joneses. I want to meet the Joneses. I don't know who they are but everybody's trying to keep up with them, and when we look at our culture and we think of guys like the Bill Gateses and the Jeff Bezos and the Mark Zuckerburgs and the multi-billionaires of our planet, well, every single one of us can hardly compare financially. But let's look at this from a true worldly perspective. 7.5 billion of us. Did you know that the average income in the world in US dollars is just shy of \$10,000 a year. That's the average income. So today and we even have assistance that's available in our culture to make sure that we get above that threshold. If your annual income is above \$10,000 a year, according to the world's statistics, you're in the wealthier half of the population.

Now I know what you're thinking, 7.5 billion people, that's a large half. It's kind of relative. Okay, you remember a couple of years ago we had a movement called Occupy Wall Street and everybody was all talking about the 1%. You know, it's interesting when you talk about the 1% of the wealthiest country on earth, it becomes a very small slice of the pie? So let's talk about the 1% in the world. What if you were to discover today that the majority of our culture actually falls in the top 1%? Now in just a moment I'm gonna share a number and you may say, "Well, I don't have that number in my life." Congratulations, you're probably in the top 2%, but to be in the top 1% of the world's wealth, you have to earn an annual income of \$32,000. That's the top 1%.

So when you look at these individuals with blind Bartimaeus on one side and the rich young ruler on the other, if we were just to take our culture and our context and overlay it with the Scripture, we're a whole lot more like the rich young ruler than we are blind Bartimaeus who's young. I know what you're thinking, "Well, I don't fit that bill anymore. Youth is not on my side." Interesting that if you were born and raised in our culture, according to the rest of the world you're going to live 20% longer than they will because of the sanitation, because of the technology that we have. So in some contexts you are young because you still have longer to live than most cultures on planet earth.

You say, "Well, I don't have authority. I don't have power. I'm not a ruler." You may have griped, you may have whined, you may have complained and you may have told everybody on social media, but if you had the privilege at some point in your life of going into a voting booth and casting your vote for who you think ought to "run things," do you know how many people in our world wish they had that opportunity? In other words, we live in a culture that on world standards is very wealthy, very youthful, and we actually have the right to voice our opinion on those who represent us. So what we discover here is when you just look at the finances of life, you and I are a whole lot more like the rich young ruler than we ever are of blind Bartimaeus.

You know, finances ultimately lead to family, does it not? Think about Bartimaeus. It says there in Mark 10, the son of Timaeus. You know that's what his name means, bar meaning son of. Why does the Bible repeat that? Because I think it's making it very clear that this individual is all alone on the side of the road. He's blind. He's begging. He has a father by the name of Timaeus but there's nobody else. At the end of the day, he doesn't pick up his coat and go home to a wife. There's no children to assist or to take care of. There's no mention of uncles and aunts and cousins and such. This is the individual, that they're in this season of life wouldn't have had anybody to gather around the table.

Now I know there are those in our culture that loneliness unfortunately is a part of this season, and there are those of us who do not have others at the table, there are those of us who do not have a whole lot of human interaction, and that is a Bartimaeus aspect, but the rich young ruler, you know, those who have much tend to have a whole lot of people gather around them because they all want a piece of it. Luke 15, whom we know as the prodigal son, the Bible says when he was spending generously, he had lots of friends, but when the money dried up, isn't it funny, he was all alone there at the foot of the swine and

the pigs. It's amazing that the rich young ruler probably left the presence of Jesus, he went home to a bustling family, probably complained about those who would gather at his table that were mooching off of his success and wealth.

You see, when you begin to look at these two individuals, they are great extremes of not only Jesus' world but ours, but they do represent us, do they not? In fact, today maybe you don't see yourself as Bartimaeus, I get it. Maybe you don't see yourself as the rich young ruler, but one of the reasons the Lord has given us these two characters in Mark 10 is because every single one of us falls somewhere in the spectrum in between. If you were to somehow do a gradient thereof, you might say, "Well, I'm just maybe in the middle a little bit toward Bartimaeus. Or maybe I'm a little bit further toward the rich young ruler." It doesn't matter where you are on the spectrum, what's interesting to me is they both meet Jesus, Jesus meets both their needs, and yet only one follows him in the way.

I want you to notice the process that Jesus uses with these two individuals. Go back to the rich young ruler. It says in verse 17 that he came running. He was actually chasing him down. He falls at his feet and he says something very interesting. He calls him Master. Now there's nothing inherently wrong with calling Jesus Master, in fact, many people called him Master but I do find it interesting the two groups of people, or shall I say two individuals who did so most frequently, the Pharisees and Judas. The Pharisees, the legalistic folks of Jesus' day said, "Oh, good Master, we know that you are a teacher that has come from God." You can almost hear the sarcasm in their voice. And Judas, the one who would betray him, never once referred to Jesus by any title other than Master.

Now was Jesus a teacher? Absolutely. Was he a master teacher? Of course. Did he possess an ability to capture an audience? Like none other. Did he have his own unique doctrine? Absolutely. So by calling him Master, it's not an erroneous title but it does fall a tad bit short. When those who consistently do not believe in him only refer to him by this title, we get a little glimpse into who this individual is.

If you'll turn the page, at least in my Bible I have to turn the page, you turn to verse 47. I want you to see how Bartimaeus refers to Jesus. It says, "And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, Son of David." In other words, the one who was prophesied from the beginning. The one who in our context we sing of Immanuel, and God with us. He recognized that this was the one who the Lord prophesied and promised back in Genesis 3 and in Genesis 12 and 15, and in Psalm 110, and 100 other places. The one who would come and save us from our sins. The one who would come and eventually in the right time reign over all of the earth. Do you see a difference here? The one who has all the trappings of the world sees Jesus as just another person with some interesting information that he wants to get a glimpse thereof. Bartimaeus, who has nothing that the world offers us, in fact, is lacking greatly says, "This is the one. This is the one who I've been told about for years can make me see again. This is the one who I've heard about for years who can not only allow me to see with my physical eyes but allow me to be saved from my sins." We'll get to that in just a moment.

Go back to the rich young ruler. I want you to see the process that Jesus utilizes and I think there have been many throughout time that have looked at this somewhat from the wrong angle so hopefully we'll get it from the right one. What we see here in verse 19 is Jesus says, "You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery. Don't kill. Don't steal. Don't bear false witness. Defraud not. Honor your father and your mother." Look at the response of the rich young ruler. He says, "I have done that since my youth." Do you smell the arrogance there? Do you smell the piety, saying, "Not only have I done these things, I have made it such in my life there is no way they could even get remotely close to me." You almost get the idea that he was so concerned about these things that he built a fortress around him so that nobody could even remotely accuse him that he had been guilty of any of these things, and then Jesus flips the script. He says, "Oh, I know that." By the way, you do know that Jesus recited five of what you and I know as the 10 Commandments, the five that Jesus knew that he had obeyed beyond a shadow of a doubt because he was young, had never probably even had the opportunity to commit adultery, because of the age of he and his parents, had probably never been tempted to defraud his parents and the list goes on. But what does Jesus say? Jesus says, "Okay, sell everything you've got, give it to the poor, take up the cross and follow me and everything's gonna be okay."

Now let me tell you what this does not mean. This does not mean that anybody who has amassed an amount of wealth cannot go to heaven. That's not what it means. The Bible does not say money is the root of all evil, it says the love of money is the root of all evil. Abraham was wealthy. David was wealthy. Solomon was wealthy. And the list can go on, and I've got news for you, when you go Hebrews 11, they're all found written in the Hall of Fame of faith. Very wealthy men. Jesus was not saying that you've got to sell everything and be on the side of the road like Bartimaeus in order to go to heaven one day. Getting rid of the material of life is not the process of salvation. Let me tell you what Jesus was doing: he was revealing to him his sinfulness that he was unwilling to recognize. Do you know what the last of the 10 Commandments is? Do not covet. Do not crave the things of this world. Do not be willing to give up your own soul for the things of this world.

When he walks away saddened, I don't believe it's because he wasn't willing to sell everything to "earn eternal life," it's because Jesus did as only Jesus can do, much like the woman who was at the well, who had had a multitude of men in her life, what did he do? He took out a surgical scalpel of the soul and he said, "You who think you have it all together, you who think that you've got everything where it's supposed to be," in our terminology, "your Excel spreadsheet has been planned for years and it keeps on going, but you have a problem. You have sinned. You have gone against the commandments of God. You have broken one of the 'Big 10.' I know it and you know it." And the problem was he didn't want to admit it. He didn't want to deal with it. He walks away saddened because he realized his own efforts would never be enough, his own attaining of wealth would never be enough.

Let's turn back to whom we know as Bartimaeus. I want you to see back in verse 47 what he says to Jesus. He says, "You're the son of David. Have mercy on me." Why is that such an important statement? Because the word "mercy" means "to not receive the punishment that you are rightfully due." You see, the rich young ruler thought he had everything together. The rich young ruler thought he had everything planned out and he was perfect. Jesus revealed to him, "You're not what you think you are." What Bartimaeus was willing to do is say, "I know I'm not who I should be. Have mercy on me." Here was a man who based on his financial condition probably never defrauded anybody. Based on his financial condition, probably never had a family of which to commit adultery on. His mother and his father probably abandoned him in his youth, how could he defraud them? In other words, he had the same resume as the rich young ruler did. He had been obedient in all these things but he said, "Have mercy on me." You see, the difference in Bartimaeus is that his condition wasn't just a physical depravity, he understood his spiritual depravity, that there was no amount of life that he could ever do or attain or acquire that would fix his sin problem. Interesting is what Jesus then says to him. He says, "Okay, fine, so what do I need to do for you?" He says, "I just want to see." Jesus speaks. The light is able to be seen by him. Jesus doesn't have to tell him to follow him, does he? The last verse, verse 52 says he just followed Jesus in the way.

So you've got two distinct persons that represent all of humanity. You've got a process by which Jesus wants to make it very clear that it is our sin condition that must be addressed, The rich young ruler, not willing to do so. Bartimaeus, he offers it up before Jesus even addresses it. But it's the picture that these two guys leave us with that I want to leave us with today. You know, we say in our culture that a picture is worth a thousand words. I don't know if I'm gonna speak an additional thousand words, but I want you to look at the picture here. Verse 21 of Mark 10, it says, "Then Jesus beholding him, he loved him and he said, One thing thou lackest." Let me give you the picture because there in Mark 10 with whom we know as the rich young ruler, Jesus is doing something that we don't see him do often. We see Jesus willing to be embraced. We see the woman who anoints his feet and his hair with the oil. We see the woman who touches the hem of his garment to be healed. We see the lepers who throw themselves at his feet. But it is a rare occasion where Jesus initiates the embrace, that Jesus actually goes and beholds him. He holds him. He hugs him, embraces him. Can you imagine how close their eyes would have been? Maybe six to eight inches in distance. You know, I had an old coach who used to say the eyes are the window to your soul. Can you imagine being that rich young ruler looking into the eyes of God on that road to Jericho?

He beheld him. What did he do? He went away. What's important is it says he went away. Jesus did not break the embrace. Jesus did not say, "Well, fine then." It says he was saddened and he went away. Let me ask you how many times in your life has God been trying to get your attention and you just run away from it? You know, one day and I joke about this all the time about all the books if I ever have time to write, one of the books I want to write is called "View from the Pulpit." I know y'all don't believe it, but I see it all. I see everything except down in the 316 center right now. I'm on video, I can't see what they're doing so they may be having a party and I don't even know it. But that being said, I see it all. One thing I want to share with you is I'm actually able to see when God's

working on you and you don't even know I know it. When we're in the midst of a service, and by the way, I understand there are time schedules, there are family emergencies, there are works, I get all that, and there are times where we just have to leave early. It's just part of life. I understand it. I get it. Don't worry about it. I'm not upset nor am I offended. There's a big difference between, "Hey, I have to be at work at a certain time and I have to go right now." By the way can I just I'm glad you came for some rather than for none? But do you know what I do see? It's when people stand up and conviction is all over their face and they say, "I can't listen to this anymore." The Lord is beholding you and you're saying, "No, not going there." And sometimes it doesn't happen while I'm speaking, sometimes it's during the invitation. It's gonna happen in just a moment, we're gonna all stand and sing and you get into what I call white knuckle syndrome, you hold onto that pew or that chair in front of you so tight because you don't want to dare admit what the Lord has shown you about your own life and what do you do? You just walk away, not willing to deal with it, much like the rich young ruler.

Interesting. He went away. He departed. He actually pulled himself out of Jesus' embrace. Now you may be thinking to yourself, "That's awfully brash thing to do." You know that when the Lord is getting our attention, it can be in a worship service like this, it can be at home during a devotion, it can be driving down the road, when the Lord gets our attention and we say, "God, I'm not gonna do it," you're doing exactly what the rich young ruler did. How many times has the Lord embraced you, beheld you, gotten all into your private world, and you've said, "No, I'd rather do it my way"?

You're not alone. It happened with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and it's happened through humanity ever since, but it's the picture of Bartimaeus that I want to leave you with today, that I want to challenge you with today. It's verse 50 of Mark 10. I believe this is one of the most profound verses in all of the Bible. I don't think it's more or less important than any other one but the picture that it gives, it says, "Then he," that's Bartimaeus, "casting away his garment, he rose and he came to Jesus." It says he cast away his garment and I want to kind of unpeel the layers there for a moment. This was the garment, this was the blanket, this was the coat, whatever it may have specifically been, that he rested upon day after day. This was his home. This was his office. This was his way of warmth in the cold and his way of shielding himself from the sun and the heat. That garment would have been his entirety. This also was the place where he most likely gathered coins from those who were being generous to him along the path. When Jesus is coming by, he shouts out, "You're the promised one! You're the Messiah!" What does he do? It says he cast aside his garment and he went to Jesus.

You say, "Jeff, why is that so important?" Because Bartimaeus believed that he was never going to need it again. He wasn't gonna need it again because once he met Jesus, he would be able to see. Once he met Jesus, he wouldn't be on the side of the road again. Once he met Jesus, he wouldn't need it to shield him from the sun or keep him warm in the cold. He exhibited a simple profound faith. He left aside his garments. Can I ask you a rhetorical question? If he didn't believe that Jesus was gonna change his life, then when there are thousands of people on the road to Jerusalem, this is Passover week, this is the super highway, this is Interstate 85 of the Middle East, how is he gonna find it again in

the midst of all that chaos? You see, when he got up, he knew he would be able to see it and he wouldn't need it.

Do you see the different pictures? The rich young ruler pulls himself out of the embrace and says, "I got this on my own. I got this, Jesus." What does Bartimaeus do? He runs with a reckless abandon. Have you ever thought about the fact he's running while blind? He doesn't know who is in front of him. He doesn't know where he is. Are there rocks, are there things to be stumbled upon? He just leaves the garment and goes to Jesus. Interesting that on the same road we can have two distinct paths, and I'm gonna ask you a very important expected question: which one of these guys are you? Are you the one who just consistently says, "God, I know you're trying to get my attention but I don't want to have anything to do with that, I'm gonna do it my way"? Or are you like Bartimaeus who says, "I'm just gonna run from it. I'm just gonna leave that which I'm trusting, that which I think is so necessary and important for my life and I'm just gonna run to Jesus. I don't have any idea what it's gonna look like but I know it's gonna be good"?

You see, today as we celebrate the Christmas season, you know there were very few people who ran to the manger that night, there were very few people who ran to the cross in John 19. Most of humanity are the rich young ruler, very few are Bartimaeus. Can I challenge you today? Don't follow the crowd. Don't follow the masses. Follow the one who in the last verse followed Jesus all the way to the cross.